



The Children's Theater in the new building of the S. P. C. A., as designed by Willy Pogany. The adventures of Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella and Snow White are pictured on the walls.

For the Unadjusted Child

By EMILY Z. FRIEDKIN.

THAT children are happy, that childhood is a time of unalloyed joy and freedom are generalizations as wrong as they are true. Curiously, the phrases about carefree childhood continue to ring even though the law recognizes the invalidity of that sloven dogma. True, the law was characteristically tardy in defining a child's right to protection against cruelty; the first child legally helped was "Mary Ellen," whose cause was championed by the only society then existing which was interested in saving sentient beings from man's and nature's inhumanity—the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Prior to 1874, when the plight of "Mary Ellen" resulted in the organization of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, by Elbridge P. Gerry, there was nobody especially concerned with caring for mistreated and tortured little animals who happened to have souls. Since then there has been a steady stride forward, and not the least of the milestones is the removal this week of the society to the Children's Building, that at once magnificent and childlike place occupying Fifth avenue between 104th and 105th streets.

Nor does it seem odd that this glorious gift came in the familiar, but so rarely realized, godmotherly fashion of fairy tales. About two years ago Rudolph Degener, Chief Police Officer of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children, reminded Mr. August Heckscher, financier and philanthropist, that he had promised to help the society.

The Children's Society, Mr. Degener explained, needed a bus, costing about \$6,000, to transport the children from the society's temporary shelter at Inwood to the Children's Court on East Twenty-second street for disposition of their cases. No, Mr. Heckscher wouldn't donate the automobile, but he would give the society the Fifth avenue property he owned, which is worth a million dollars, but which wouldn't be immediately of any use to the society unless three million other dollars accompanied the land—\$1,750,000 to erect the building and \$1,250,000 to run it. And the three million dollars came!

Mr. Heckscher did it with his fountain pen, which is, I suppose, the magic wand in this twentieth century.

The Case of Mary Ellen.

Let us go back again to "Mary Ellen," a half century ago, before

New York, prosperous and otherwise, moved north. "Mary Ellen" lived in Hell's Kitchen with foster parents who had legally adopted her, and then, because it was considered nobody's business but their own, beat the child and abused her generally. There was no organization to contest her legal custodian's right to treat her as he pleased, and when a complaint was lodged against him by Mrs. Etta A. Wheeler, a church worker, the nice legal question was asked: "Did you witness the assault and battery?"

Now the term "assault and battery" in connection with cruelty to children has gone the way of the word "criminal," which the law forbids—the offender under sixteen is a delinquent. In all cases of improper guardianship the child is clearly the victim and not the culprit to any extent. This is fully recognized by the Children's Court and Society.

Indeed, it would be difficult to attach blame to the child held in custody by the society because a neighbor lodged a complaint that the child had been branded with an ice pick heated white. This is one of the recent, incredible atrocities committed against a child demanding the society's attention and justifying its existence—if that is still necessary. Investigation revealed that this mother's unnatural cruelty was an effort to break the child of a trifling habit.

Another instance of inability of a parent to deal intelligently and humanely with his child was that of the nine-year-old lad found with chains three feet long wound about his ankles, with the padlock between the feet so that walking was impossible. The boy's father bound him that way on Wednesday before leaving the city to visit his wife in Asbury Park; the condition was not discovered until Sunday. The father's explanation was that he did it "to teach the boy not to leave home."

One of the many activities of the society is to investigate baby farms, in which work it cooperates with the Board of Health, which issues permits for the boarding of infants and young children if the physical conditions of the homes are satisfactory. Last year the society investigated more than 2,000 of these boarding homes and not infrequently found that the children were tolerated only as a source of income and were suffering serious bodily and mental harm. But the society does not stop with investigating licensed boarding homes; it alertly watches the advertising columns, answers each ad-

vertisement and investigates them all. Indeed, it is only yesterday's news that the last of the four babies in an unlicensed home died at Bellevue, where it was removed by the society's investigator who spied an advertisement. Although it was too late to save any of the four children under her care the guilty woman was prevented from starving to death any more children which might be left with her. She was judged insane and committed to the Central Islip Hospital.

Sometimes the mother of one of the boarded children will lodge the complaint against the home but it also happens that the mother finds it advantageous to be unconcerned about the child's welfare; indeed, it is a convenient way of abandoning a child and continuing to keep within the law because the child "has been placed in a home."

Inhuman Mothers.

The "incorrigible mother" is a common phenomenon to the society's officers—but she now finds it difficult to get away with it. Oddly enough, while I was waiting to speak with an officer a woman came and complained that her child was "beyond control" and that she wished it committed. The child sat next me and seemed quite shy and tractable—but, of course, you never can tell. At any rate, such cases are investigated and if the child really is incorrigible the parent is not relieved of responsibility entirely. No children are committed to institutions except as a very last resort.

In 1921 there was a noticeable increase in the number of abandonment cases. Where the offender has deserted, leaving his children in destitute circumstances, the matter is referred by the District Attorney to the Children's Society for investigation, which establishes the facts necessary to secure an indictment. Through cooperation with the courts of this country and Canada the delinquent father is located and tried. In many cases of conviction the society, by special request of the court, is made the custodian of a trust fund sufficient to insure the weekly payments ordered.

One of many of last year's abandoned babies was found in a furnished room which the mother had rented the day previous. Just leaving the baby there in the room was the easiest way its mother saw of getting rid of a child who stood in the way of a proposed marriage. The baby was taken to a hospital, where he died. The mother was lo-

cated by the society, tried and convicted of abandonment.

Other "lost children" include the hundreds who yearly find their way to the metropolis, driven by that urge every one of us with a lively sense of adventure knows—the wanderlust. They are usually picked up and brought to the society for shelter. A careful examination is made before they are returned to their homes.

Discipline and Runaways.

In connection with "runaway girls" it is interesting to note, according to Mr. Degener, that the majority of them come from well kept, clean homes where the discipline is more apt to be straight and strict than loose. It is this very severity, this adherence to the European ideal of maidenly conduct, which is very different from flapper ethics, that causes the girl to leave home. She is not vicious—she is simply, as Mr. Degener put it, neither fish nor flesh. She's usually the "first generation," and there is an almost unbridgeable gulf between her and her parents. The society's agents try to build a nexus of understanding—to convince the parent that it is better to let the girl play after school hours than to be compelled to embroider or to potter about the kitchen; and to show the girl that her parents are merely solicitous rather than inhuman.

Which brings me to one of the gratifying features of the new building. It has, oh, inevitably! a "model apartment," but here "model" is used in its sense of "typical" rather than "perfect." This flat, then—for it is modeled out of a single ordinary room in the building, divided into four in the size and manner of rooms in a Rivington street tenement—this flat will be the special province of delinquent girls, some of whom unfortunately are about to enter upon forced marriages.

But after all, if there was not the basis of an uncommon and discerning intelligence the Heckscher Foundation for Children would be but another grand institution, nothing less. Fortunately it portends to be much more. One can only fervently hope that all connected with the society are as impervious as is Mr. Degener to becoming "case hardened"—that fatal disease which makes social work a job and builds institutions which stultify rather than develop. Nor need there be desire for achievement beyond the purpose expressed by Mr. Degener to build up a healthy resistance against unfavorable environment; to develop individuality not incompatible with the ability to adjust oneself to the group living demanded by our very gregariousness—withal to realize one's own dignity and rights and the rights and dignity of the other fel-

low, and to withstand the inevitable assaults of life.

This constructive work of discovering and encouraging faculties for initiative and responsibility will be, largely, in the hands of the Heckscher Foundation, which occupies one-half of the new building; but, practically, the foundation and the society are one, since the directorates of both interlock, for M. Linn Bruce is president of both organizations and Ernest K. Coulter is general manager of both; also the charter provides that at least seven of the twelve trustees of the foundation must be directors of the society. But the society's main task will be, as heretofore, legal; the bringing to trial and keeping in custody children under improper guardianship or juvenile delinquents whose cases are awaiting disposition. The Heckscher Foundation will care for some 3,000 children daily, giving them the healthy outlets in play and work they need.

The New Quarters.

Although you see, looking west from the spacious roof playgrounds, the botanical gardens of Central Park, and beyond that the meadows, and further, the slopes of Morning-side Heights, you have but to right-about-face to confront the tops of the tenements of the slums that are more northerly, only, than those downtown, they are not a whit less congested, or less smelly, or more conducive to individual pride and privacy. At first thought the location of the new building seems absurdly "uptown" but it is, actually, centrally located not only with regard to population but also to serve the three children's courts located on 168th, 125th and Twenty-second streets.

The "model apartment" in the Children's Building is a distinct departure from tradition; it is a replica of what the girl has to live in—has had to live in, even down to the furniture which has been bought of East Side dealers. The flat consists of a bedroom, kitchen, sitting room and bathroom—and they don't overlook Central Park, out of large windows. On the contrary, the windows of the bedroom and kitchen are small and high and open on the corridor which is the best the Children's Building can do to simulate an air-shaft. The bathtub may not be used to store coal or ice but it will be used for laundry work, as most bathtubs in flats are—if the flat boasts a tub! This, then, will be the girl's home and she will have the run of it and the practice of handling it. This is but one instance of the successful evasion of the abhorred institutionalism.

The new, large quarters remove

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